

WASHINGTON, D.C. September 25, 2009



TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: Richard Stone, NCSJ Chairman;
Alexander Smukler, NCSJ President;
Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director**

In Brief: United Nations General Assembly

Dear Friend,

I have spent most of this week in New York City joining colleagues from other Jewish organizations in meetings tied to the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. New York is always a hectic environment, but never more so than when heads of state, foreign ministers and other officials descend on the area around the United Nations. U.S. President Barack Obama met with many of his counterparts, including Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Of course, there were also the usual collection of rogue leaders trying to take advantage of the world stage afforded to them. Unfortunately, we endured the likes of Ahmadinejad, Gaddafi and Chavez, who spewed hatred and animosity during their speeches before the General Assembly.

NCSJ participated in many meetings with foreign leaders from around the world, including Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and other senior officials from the former Soviet Union. The first issue raised in all of the meetings with foreign leaders was Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Our community is on record in support of stronger sanctions against Iran. In many of the meetings there was support for stronger sanctions, but some countries, most notably Russia, believe Iran is many years away, if ever, from having the capacity to develop nuclear weapons.

We had a very positive meeting with President Yushchenko, however, we did raise with him our concern and objections over published reports regarding the possible construction of a hotel on or near the Babi Yar Memorial. We urged him not to allow Kyiv officials to follow through on such an inappropriate action. The President said he would speak to the Kyiv Mayor, and did not believe that this decision would take place (In addition to raising it with President Yushchenko we have been in contact with the NSC, State Department, the Helsinki Commission and Members of Congress).

As I mentioned, Russia has grave doubts about U.S. led efforts to implement additional sanctions against Iran. Foreign Minister Lavrov is one of the brightest and most articulate diplomats we meet, and it is always a challenging and worthwhile conversation. However, by the end of our discussion we were no closer to agreeing on sanctions than at the beginning of the discussion. We did have the opportunity to raise other issues, including the ongoing fight to combat xenophobia, extremism and anti-Semitism. NCSJ and several of our member organizations have worked with the Russian government to better address this problem.

In addition to articulating our concerns about Iran in meetings, NCSJ and other national Jewish organizations joined the Stand for Freedom in Iran Rally organized by the New York Jewish Community Relations Council and the UJA-Federation of New York with the co-sponsorship of many of Jewish and non-Jewish groups. The New York rally was part of a national effort that included events across the United States.

As we approach Yom Kippur, I want to wish everyone Shabbat Shalom and Gimar Hatima Tova.

Sincerely,

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. September 25, 2009

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#1a

Azerbaijan President meets representatives of Jewish community in Guba region Trend News, September 22, 2009

Azerbaijan President meets representatives of Jewish community in Guba region

On his way to Baku from Gusar region, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev met with representatives of Jewish community in Red settlement of the Guba region, State News Agency Azertag reported Friday.

The residents expressed gratitude to the Azerbaijani leader for his care to development of Guba.

The Head of State expressed satisfaction with ongoing construction works in the region.

President Ilham Aliyev congratulated the residents and wished them good health.

The President ended his visit to Guba and Gusar regions.

#1b

Rosh Hashanah Warms Hearts in Northern Russia FJC, Monday, September 21 2009

SYKTYVKAR, Russia – Jews of the Komi Republic were among the millions of Jews worldwide who celebrated the Jewish New Year 5770. Rosh Hashanah services took place in the dining room of the Komi State University, since the local Jewish Community Center is not large enough to accommodate all of the participants.

Old and young Jews from all walks of life joined with one another in this affirmation of Jewish continuity. Baruch Finkelstein, the celebrated cantor from the S. Petersburg Choral Synagogue, led the prayers. The highlight for everyone was the blowing of the Shofar which was eagerly anticipated.

The chairman of the local Jewish community, Leonid Silberg, greeted everyone and wished them a happy and sweet New Year. He then read a congratulatory message from Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar. "We believe that on this day, it is as if G-d creates us anew and gives us new opportunities and the abilities to achieve them. We pray for all people in the world, because Adam was the father of all peoples," read the message.

The Rosh Hashanah celebration also involved numerous high-profile guests, who eagerly conveyed their best wishes to the Jewish community on this most solemn occasion. Evgeniy Rozhkin, Deputy Minister of National Policy of the Republic of Komi, was one of those who spoke to the participants, wishing Jews across the Komi Republic the best new year ahead and the Jewish community continued success in its affairs.

The Jewish community of Syktyvkar, a member of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, is the center of Jewish life in the Komi Republic, located in the European part of the Russian north.

#1c
Historic Ukrainian synagogue rededicated
JTA, September 22, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- A historic synagogue was rededicated in Ukraine decades after it was closed by the Communist Party.

Area rabbis dedicated the Khmelnytsky Synagogue last week in the western Ukraine town of Khmelnytsky in a ceremony attended by local Jews and politicians.

The building includes a prayer hall, as well as a photo exhibition of Jewish monuments and memorials.

The synagogue was founded in 1890 and was returned by the government to the Jewish charity Chesed Besht in 2006. Local sponsors funded the reconstruction, which was initiated by Chesed Besht director Igor Ratushny.

#1d
Israeli envoy asks U.S. Jews to support Azerbaijan
JTA, September 22, 2009

WASHINGTON -- An Israeli consul general in the United States urged American Jews to support Azerbaijan.

Yaakov Dayan, the envoy for the southwestern states based in Los Angeles, and Azerbaijani Consul General to Los Angeles Elin Suleymanov expressed the importance of Azerbaijan-Israel cooperation at a roundtable last week in Los Angeles on Azerbaijan-Israel cooperation.

Both spoke about the strategic relations between Azerbaijan and the United States, and remarked on the importance of Israeli President Shimon Peres' recent trip to the former Soviet republic.

Dayan called on American Jews to support Azerbaijan, which is located in the Caucasus region on the border of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, calling Azerbaijan a tolerant country that plays an important role in the region. Few Jews live in the mostly Muslim nation of more than 8 million.

Representatives of the Jewish community in Los Angeles also attended the roundtable.

#1e
Central Ukrainian synagogue vandalized
JTA, September 23, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- Two unidentified vandals threw red paint on the walls and windows of a synagogue in a central Ukrainian city.

In addition, anti-Semitic slogans were written on the walls of the synagogue in Kremenchug on Sunday night. The attackers also distributed anti-Semitic leaflets that read "Death to kikes!" throughout the building.

No one was hurt in the attack.

Local police are investigating, but no arrests have been reported. A police surveillance tape filmed the incident.

Local Jewish activists told JTA that in June, four unidentified vandals threw seven cans of brown paint on the synagogue in Kremenchug.

Last summer, street lights near the synagogue were repaired to prevent vandalism.

Kremenchug, which has a population of about 232,000, is an important industrial town in the Poltava region and one of the leading industrial centers in Ukraine.

#1f

Ukrainian president says not 'proud' of ties with Russia Interfax-Ukraine, September 22, 2009

President Viktor Yushchenko has said he is not proud of relations between Ukraine and Russia.

"These relations are not such that I could be proud of them," the Interfax-Ukraine news agency quoted him as telling the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City on 21 September.

He added that "neighbours should have a much better relationship and be able to settle even the most difficult inherited issues".

Yushchenko said he hoped that one day "Russia will find the strength, wisdom and possibility to welcome such relations".

He also expressed hope that the Russian Black Sea Fleet would leave Crimea in 2017.

"We hope that Russia will keep the promise it made in 1997 and that the Russian Black Sea Fleet will be withdrawn on 28 May 2017," he said.

#1g

Ukrainian council condemned for defending Demjanjuk JTA, September 24, 2009

The Ukrainian Jewish Committee has condemned the Lvov regional council for defending Nazi guard John Demjanjuk.

Lawmakers in the Ukrainian city of Lvov are claiming that the upcoming trial in Germany of Demjanjuk, who worked at the Sobibor concentration camp during World War II and was stripped of his U.S. citizenship and deported several months ago, is an international conspiracy to discredit Ukraine in world opinion, the Kiev Post reported Thursday.

The Ukrainian Jewish Committee said that the lawmakers are making "a big mistake."

"Ukrainians are perceived globally as a winning nation in World War II, a nation that suffered the largest losses in the fight against fascism. Lvov deputies' provocative appeals are asserting undesirable and unobjective associations in the minds of many," the committee said in a statement on Thursday.

Demjanjuk, 89, is charged in Germany with being an accessory to the murder of some 27,900 Jews in the gas chambers at the Sobibor extermination camp in Poland.

In the early 1980s, he was accused of being the notorious guard Ivan the Terrible at the Treblinka death camp, and he was deported to Israel in 1986 and sentenced to death in 1988. But the Israeli Supreme Court overturned his conviction in 1993 after finding reasonable doubt that he was Ivan the Terrible.

The U.S. Justice Department charged Demjanjuk with being a guard at Sobibor and revoked his citizenship in 2002 for lying about his Nazi past. His deportation was approved in 2005. Germany requested his extradition in March. He was extradited to Germany in May, where he remains in prison.

#2

Obama's Missile Defense Concession Holds an Opportunity for European Security It's a concession, but it could present an opportunity as well By Paul J. Saunders

U.S. News & World Report, September 18, 2009

President Barack Obama's decision to drop the Bush administration's plans for missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic is unquestionably a major concession to Moscow, whether or not he or Russia's leaders are prepared to admit it. While the move highlights the unhappy geography and tough political choices facing Central European leaders, it could also create an important opportunity to strengthen European security. The administration would do well to use this chance to try to encourage new and different relationships between the former Soviet bloc and Russia.

After the end of the Cold War, the United States embraced Central Europe as the spoils of victory over Communism. America's policy—including bringing many new members into NATO—was driven by a pragmatic (if not always wisely implemented) desire to secure and stabilize the European continent, by the domestic political work of diaspora groups in the United States, and by a degree of moral discomfort at having been unable to prevent Soviet domination or end it sooner.

By and large, the Central Europeans enthusiastically reciprocated these sentiments, seeing a close connection to America as essential protection from Moscow, about which they remained uneasy. Some governments, such as Poland's, energetically courted Washington and went so far as to send troops to Iraq.

Ultimately, however, the close relationship between the United States and Central European governments in the aftermath of the Cold War seems likely to be the exception rather than the rule, an overreaction that will fade over time.

There are several reasons for this, but the fundamental one is that the region was of special interest to America primarily because of the U.S.-Soviet competition in Europe. Without disparaging any of Central Europe's governments or peoples, they were not intrinsically vital to American national interests absent the Cold War rivalry. Despite significant effort on their part in some cases, they contribute comparatively little to the United States in security, economic, or political terms and are likely to receive little from Washington in return. (Poland avidly sought reconstruction contracts in Iraq, for example, and was disappointed.) Moreover, their economic relations are generally stronger with Europe than America, and will probably only continue to intensify further, while trade with America will be limited, relatively speaking. Finally, while people-to-people ties are strong today, the generation that fled Communism to America is disappearing. By contrast, Europe's open borders will lead to deeper ties there as time moves onward.

Notwithstanding the very real difficulties of working with Moscow, the United States has much more at stake in its relationship with Russia, on issues ranging from non-proliferation and arms control to energy security and in places like Afghanistan, Iran, and North Korea. Scrapping the Polish interceptors and Czech radar removes one of the most significant irritants in U.S.-Russian relations and makes sense, although it would have made a lot more sense to be certain in advance that Russia would adjust its own policies too—especially on Iran. Hopefully this happened in private.

Committed Atlanticists within the Central European elites—whose friendship Americans should appreciate—sensed the possibility of slow but relentless disengagement from the United States and responded with great anxiety, including in a widely-publicized July open letter signed by former Czech dissident and president Vaclav Havel, former Polish trade union leader and president Lech Walesa, and other top ex-officials from across the region. Pleading for more attention from the Obama administration, the group expressed concern that American officials believe Central Europe has been "fixed" and have "largely stopped worrying about" them. The letter's signatories also feared that the United States and Western Europe could make "the wrong concessions to Russia" (read: missile defense and new security architecture).

From this perspective, the Bush Administration's missile defense plan was basically an effort by some in America and some in Central Europe to lock in a tighter security relationship between the United States and the host countries and thereby to reverse or at least slow otherwise dominant geopolitical trends. Advocates of the plan seemed to believe that Moscow's reaction to the systems could be safely ignored. But pursuing missile defense without an understanding with Russia would more likely have proven too clever by half, fueling confrontation with Moscow and strengthening U.S. security cooperation with Central Europeans at great expense to other important American interests and the interests of Central European nations themselves. (Just ask the Georgians.)

That the actual contribution to protecting Europe from Iranian or other missiles was not so clear made this kind of confrontation even less attractive to the new administration. The fact that two Bush appointees—Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen—recommended a different approach to President Obama is telling.

Ironically, Central Europe can only hope to be of great interest to America in a long-term period of tension and conflict with Russia that all three would do well to avoid. Still, Central European governments could do a service to all concerned—and more productively increase their relevance to the United States in the process—by trying to become a bridge between America and Russia rather than a battlefield.

Russia will be the reason that they matter for some time to come, and Central Europeans should focus on turning lemons into lemonade rather than sour expressions.

Mr. Obama specifically reassured Poland and the Czech Republic in his brief remarks on the new missile defense plan, mentioning not only his conversations with their leaders, but also America's commitment to them under Article 5 of the treaty that established NATO. That was necessary and appropriate. Now, the President should encourage them about not only their immediate security, but also longer-term regional stability—something that takes a lot more work than NATO membership and missile defense.

#3

Putin Seeks Trade Concessions After U.S. Missile Move

By Paul Abelsky and Lyubov Pronina

Bloomberg, September 18, 2009

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin called for trade concessions, including an end to restrictions on technology transfers to Russia, following U.S. President Barack Obama's decision to abandon a missile shield in Europe.

"I'm counting on other decisions to follow this correct and brave decision, including the complete elimination of restrictions on cooperation with Russia and on transfers of high technology to Russia as well as an intensification of World Trade Organization expansion to include Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan," Putin said at a business forum in Sochi today.

Obama yesterday said he was scrapping the missile-system proposal, championed by his predecessor George W. Bush in the face of Russian opposition, in favor of a more flexible system better able to protect against threats to the U.S. and its European allies, primarily from Iran.

Putin announced in June that Russia would seek to join the WTO as part of a customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, a proposal that U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke called "not workable and unacceptable." Medvedev said in July that Russia may join separately from its neighbors.

The U.S. maintains Cold War-era trade restrictions on Russia under the 1974 Jackson-Vanik amendment, imposed in response to Soviet limitations on Jewish emigration. Putin has called repeatedly for the U.S. to repeal the amendment.

'Responsible' Move

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev welcomed Obama's "responsible" decision to abandon Bush's plan for a radar installation in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles in Poland. The plan contributed to the worst state of relations between Russia and the U.S. since the Cold War, even though the U.S. maintained the system wasn't directed against Russia.

Medvedev issued a challenge hours after Obama's election win in November, saying he'd deploy short-range Iskander missiles in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, wedged between Poland and Lithuania, to "neutralize" the U.S. system if it were built. Russia viewed the proposed system as a threat to its security.

A Kremlin official said Russia "will of course have to review" the proposed deployment in Kaliningrad after Obama's announcement. The Interfax news service cited an unidentified diplomat as saying that Russia will "freeze" and may "cancel" the Iskander plan.

'Stricter Sanctions'

In Washington, some lawmakers said Russia should respond to the U.S. initiative by backing Washington on Iran. Senator Chuck Schumer said it was time for the Russians "to join our push to impose stricter sanctions on Iran in order to halt its nuclear weapons program."

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, secretary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, also called on Russia to drop its opposition to tighter sanctions against Iran. He urged the Kremlin to "join us in putting a maximum of political and diplomatic pressure on Iran to stop Iran's nuclear aspirations."

Russia, which is helping Iran build its first nuclear power plant at Bushehr, has a veto on the United Nations Security Council and has consistently opposed moves to isolate the country. Russia is also a member of the group of six countries addressing concerns about Iran's nuclear program.

Medvedev said on Sept. 15 that sanctions are “not a very effective thing,” though “sometimes one must have recourse” to them. The comment, made in a meeting with international experts on Russia, struck some participants as more West-leaning than the line taken by Putin.

‘Harsher Line’

Sergei Prikhodko, an aide to Medvedev, said today that it would be wrong to speak of Russian “concessions” in response to the U.S. move.

“We have to engage Iran,” Dmitry Rogozin, Russia’s envoy to NATO, said in Brussels today. “The harsher words are pronounced as regards Iran, the more sanctions there are, the worse it is for all, because that could only stimulate a harsher line in Iran itself.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday that nuclear talks scheduled for Oct. 1 between Iran and the U.S., China, Russia, the U.K., France and Germany have a “real chance” of producing “agreements allowing for the restoration of confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear program,” Interfax reported.

Lavrov said that wasting this chance “by demanding the immediate imposition of sanctions” against Iran would be a “serious mistake,” the Moscow-based news service reported.

#4

Missile Policy Prompts Plea for Trade Concessions

By Adriel Bettelheim

CQ Politics, September 18, 2009

Less than a day after President Obama scrapped the missile-defense system championed by George W. Bush, Russia's leaders called on the administration and Congress to lift Cold War-era trade restrictions, including curbs on sensitive technology transfers.

At a business forum in the Black Sea city of Sochi, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin praised Obama's decision to cancel plans to deploy interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic "correct and brave," then pressed for U.S. trade concessions -- particularly the repeal of the so-called Jackson-Vanik amendment to a 1974 trade bill (PL 93-618) that links exports to human rights. The measure -- a long-running source of friction in Washington-Moscow relations that's named for its sponsors, former Sen. Henry Jackson, D-Wash. and Rep. Charles Vanik, D-Ohio, -- was enacted to pressure the Soviet Union to liberalize Jewish emigration.

The Bush missile plan had been viewed as a threat by the Russians. Officials there hope Obama's turnabout is part of a larger thaw in relations between the countries that they can turn to their economic advantage.

Obama administration officials say they are reconfiguring defenses to focus on the threat of medium-range missiles from Iran.

Russia, which is working in tandem with Belarus and Kazakhstan to join the World Trade Organization, wants the United States to axe remaining trade barriers and give its go-ahead to a WTO expansion. But many in Congress believe Russia should first join U.S.-led diplomatic efforts to pressure Iran to abandon its nuclear program. And Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton figuratively threw some cold water on Putin's linkage of the issues during an appearance at the Brookings Institution on Friday, saying the missile decision "was not about Russia. It was about Iran and the threat that its ballistic missile program poses.

"Because of this position, we believe we will be in a far stronger position to deal with that threat, and to do so with technology that works and a higher degree of confidence that what we pledge to do, we can actually deliver," Clinton said.

#5

Muslim President: “Shana Tova”

By Rob Eshman

Jewish Journal, September 21, 2009

This doesn't happen often.

And by “often,” I mean, “never.”

The president of a Shi'ite Muslim nation reached out to his country's and the world's Jews to wish them a happy new year, or “shana tova” in Hebrew.

President Ilham Aliyev sent a message of greetings to the Jewish community of Azerbaijan on the Rosh Hashanah holiday (Jewish New Year), then pinged it via e-mail to the rest of the world. The message reads:

“We consider ethnic and religious diversity a historical achievement of the modern Azerbaijani society, in which traditional friendship, brotherhood and tolerance among different nations have always reigned.

Guaranteeing human rights and freedoms for everybody – irrespective of their language, religion and ethnicity – is one of the key priorities of our policy aimed at ensuring stability, peace and civil solidarity.

The independent State of Azerbaijan have always attached a particular emphasis to this issue and necessary democratic and legal basis had been created in the country to ensure that all national minorities, including the Jewish community, safeguard their national and cultural originality and traditions and develop their language and culture.

It is with great pleasure that I would like to note that our Jewish citizens are actively involved in the socio-political life of our country and the process of building democratic statehood.

Dear friends,

The Rosh Hashanah is a holiday of renewal, repentance and moral purity. May this dear day bring good news, joy and happiness to you and your families.”

It's possible that other Muslim rulers went through the motions of wishing their Jews a happy holiday. But what makes Aliyev's pronouncement so meaningful is he seems to mean it. Azerbaijan is a small nation with a history of tolerance and an active engagement with Israel and world Jewry. As I wrote in a column several years ago:

It is a majority Shi'ite country—70 percent Shi'ite, the rest mostly Sunni. It is a democratic secular state whose religious and ethnic minorities are embraced. Azerbaijan gave women the right to vote in 1919—one year before the United States did.

“My teachers were Jews. My doctors were Jews,” [Azerbaijan Consul General] Suleymanov said. “They have lived with us through good and bad times.” (Azerbaijan's most famous Jew? Chess grand master Garry Kasparov.)

When Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad held his Holocaust denial conference earlier this winter, the Azerbaijani television station aired a debate on it featuring Arthur Lenk, Israel's Ambassador to Azerbaijan (yes, the same man who was Israel's deputy consul general in Los Angeles in the mid-'90s).

“He got one full hour,” Suleymanov said. “There was a feeling he won the debate.”

It's not just about tolerance. One-sixth of Israel's oil supply comes from Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is an economically thriving, moderate and tolerant majority-Islamic nation with great oil wealth—like the real Kazakhstan, in a way.

Of course, Azerbaijan is small—8 million people to Iran's 75 million. But Azeris, the ethnic group that makes up the majority of Azerbaijanis, account for some 20 million Iranians. Mullahs who have tried to gain traction for fundamentalist teachings in Baku have met with little success, and Azeris in Iran have had a liberalizing influence.

This is no shallow PR effort. The Jewish Journal's contributor Gabriel Lerner traveled to Azerbaijan in 2008 and reported on a country where coexistence is a centuries-old value.

“Not unlike the Jews of Sefarad (Spain) during the First Caliphate,” Lerner writes, “Azerbaijan's Jewry is interwoven into the fabric of this state, which emerged in August 1991 from the Soviet Union. And despite their minuscule numbers—maybe 12,000 in a population of 8 million—their presence is known and acknowledged...”

So, President Aliyev: Shana Tova right back at you. A year of peace for Muslims and Jews in Azerbaijan, and everywhere else too.

#6 Russia Tries to Control the Reset Button

By John Vinocur
New York Times, September 22, 2009

BRUSSELS — When Russia issues a reminder that it wants to buy an advanced, helicopter-carrying warship from France that's built for amphibious assaults — hello all you folks along the Black, Baltic and Caspian Seas — then it's pressing deeper its own reset button on altered relations with the United States and NATO.

The Americans can insist that scrapping plans for a ground-based missile shield on Moscow's borders is all about Iran and not Russia, and that the Obama administration has traded away nothing to the Russians in the process.

But the Kremlin has made clear its will to extend what it considers a triumph. It's talking up a plan that Russia sees as containing an alliance-splitting downside for the United States whichever way it turns.

The latest gambit is the warship purchase bid. Trumpeted by Russia three times over the last month — think Moscow wants to grab Europe's attention? — and confirmed by the French Defense Ministry, the Russian proposal involves buying a 21,300-ton Mistral class helicopter carrier and eventual joint production of four or five more.

A response of silence over the long term from the American side could look like another cave-in to Russia in the minds of the European and Central Asian allies who consider Moscow to have vetoed the ground-based missile defense system.

Even more problematically, should a deal for the helicopter carriers materialize, it would open the door — at least in the view of an American specialist on international arms transactions — for European allies to sell arms to China.

That's a horrific idea for the American military, yet it remains a suspended project on a low flame inside the European Union. Indeed, China arms sales continue to have the open backing of President Nicolas Sarkozy.

But how does the United States say no nowadays to Russia (and France, if it agrees to build the ship and share the technology) on a major military transfer when the administration does not want to consider Russia a strategic threat?

Would the United States lie down across the tracks to block a Russian arms deal with the French, when the Russians say they could also make offers to the Netherlands or Spain, described as having the necessary technology? Not comfortably or coherently now, and certainly not without reviving the boss-in-big-boots NATO role President Barack Obama isn't eager to play.

Russia, though, is exulting in a process in which its influence appears to be growing while American policy setbacks wobble from diminished control over events in Iran, North Korea and Afghanistan to taunting Russian arms sales to Venezuela.

In relation to the ship purchase talks — against the background of Russia's invasion of Georgia last year and its virtual annexation of two Georgian provinces — the Russian Navy's commander in chief, Adm. Vladimir Vysotsky, rhapsodized over how he could have done the Georgia job in 40 minutes instead of 26 hours if he had had the French warship.

Add Vladimir Putin's voice to the armed forces chiefs of staff, and politicians who, while applauding an American fade on the missile shield, want to convert it into divisiveness in NATO and a weakened role for the United States as guarantor of Russia's former Soviet bloc neighbors.

In an account of a conversation published in Germany last week just before the rollback, Mr. Putin said he could not understand why Europe would hesitate to move forward in "cooperation" with Russia on military technology. (A hint: his country's absence of a rule of law, its denial of Iran's nuclear weapons intentions, and its past threats to target NATO members engaged in the missile shield.)

But those tactics may seem to Mr. Putin to have worked. And he appears to think he's on a roll in relation to the United States — able to frustrate Washington, divide it from friends, and to a certain extent maintain Russia as the obligatory point of passage for anything positive to happen on Iran.

The warship contract gambit is an example of his relish in playing this strong hand.

It's striking, though, how hard people informed about U.S. administration policy here insist it's meaningless that the Russians, who claimed in paranoid mode the land-based shield was a threat to their security, can now portray its elimination as their victory.

More reassuringly, I continued in Brussels to hear this description of America's very realistic analysis of Russia:

A country that does not want Iran to have a nuclear weapon; yet one that will play out the issue to the disadvantage of the United States as long as possible, and above all would prefer no solution on Iran (or the anti-American fallout from an attack on Iranian installations) to accepting an arrangement in which Russia would see itself subordinated to a U.S. plan or design.

Difficult.

A rogue thought enters here. Is the United States in such a discomforted position that it could tell Moscow, we might want to think about your idea that Russia take over all of Iran's nuclear enrichment? On the condition, of course, that Iranians are locked into an inspection regimen that blocks them from ever having enough enriched uranium to make a bomb.

It's an idea that has run around, respecting the Russians to death and sparing them from ever having to admit they've disregarded the truth in insisting Iran's atomic program has no military goals.

But at a time when Russia's thumb is aggressively jabbing at its own reset button in relation to America, it's a notion that makes two depressingly elementary mistakes: crediting the Kremlin with game-breaking influence over Iran (or anything else); and expecting the mullahs, in crisis, to turn back from what has become their existential mission.

#7

UN, G20 but No Dissidents During Medvedev's U.S. Trip

By Nikolaus von Twickel

Moscow Times, September 22, 2009

President Dmitry Medvedev will address the UN General Assembly on reforms to international relations, discuss how to end the crisis with leaders of the world's leading 20 economies, and sit down with heads of state during a visit to the United States this week.

But Medvedev should remember that his country is nowhere near to being the superpower of Soviet days and lags far behind other countries in terms of importance on global financial markets, analysts said Monday.

On a related matter, a Kremlin spokesman said Monday that the president had to cancel a planned meeting with U.S. dissidents because of time constraints.

"Sadly, it was simply impossible to set up such an event within the president's tight schedule here," Kremlin spokesman Alexei Pavlov told The Moscow Times by telephone from New York.

Medvedev caused a minor stir last week when he told Western experts on Russia in the Valdai Club that he wanted to speak to dissidents during his U.S. trip.

"Let them tell me what problems the United States has," he said, in an apparent dig at the habit of visiting U.S. officials to meet with the opposition in Moscow.

In his address to the UN General Assembly on Wednesday, Medvedev will stress Moscow's views on how to make the system of international relations more fair and balanced, the Kremlin said in an e-mailed statement.

Medvedev has made reforming Europe's security architecture one of the major themes of his presidency, reflecting the Kremlin's dislike of NATO's expansion to include former Soviet bloc countries.

He also recently assailed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for addressing "nonessential issues," in line with Moscow's frustration at the organization's frequent criticism in its role as a human rights and democracy watchdog.

Medvedev will attend a UN Security Council meeting Thursday that will focus on Iran and the nonproliferation of nuclear missiles.

The event is seen as a crucial test for U.S. President Barack Obama, who will for the first time in his presidency chair a Security Council meeting and who has threatened harsher sanctions for Tehran if it does not accept good-faith talks by next week. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov ruled out UN sanctions against Iran last week.

The Obama administration's decision to scrap the missile defense shield in Central Europe has been widely seen as a signal to the Kremlin to offer concessions on the Iran issue, and NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen urged Moscow on Friday to help put diplomatic pressure on Iran not to develop nuclear weapons.

Medvedev has offered nothing concrete so far, merely saying Tuesday that it was not only the West that was concerned about Iran.

In New York, Medvedev is expected to hold one-on-one talks with Obama. He will hold separate meetings with Chinese leader Hu Jintao, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Japan's new prime minister, Yukio Hatoyama, the Kremlin said. It did not say which of the meetings would take place in Pittsburgh and New York.

While Russia's permanent seat and veto in the Security Council might give it the comfortable feeling of being a great power, the ensuing Group of 20 summit in Pittsburgh might prove more sobering, analysts said.

In outlining Russia's goals for the summit last week, Kremlin economic aide Arkady Dvorkovich said Moscow primarily hoped to push for the reform of global financial institutions, including more clout for developing countries in organizations like the International Monetary Fund. Medvedev echoed this when he said during a visit to Switzerland on Monday that the G20 should speed up its work on reaching globally binding agreements on financial market regulation, Bloomberg reported.

Dvorkovich suggested that Medvedev would take a constructive line at the G20 summit, saying the gathering must focus on implementing previously agreed bailout measures and should not be burdened with a lengthy new to-do list.

He also downplayed Medvedev's statement on Sept. 14 that "one country's ill-conceived financial policies" were to blame for the crisis, a thinly veiled jab at the United States. Dvorkovich stressed that Medvedev has also noted that Russia's own shortcomings had worsened the domestic meltdown.

Dvorkovich also said discussions of a new world reserve currency to replace the dollar, once a key Kremlin initiative, would not be high on the summit agenda.

Analysts said Medvedev would have to take a back seat in Pittsburgh after Russia's attempts to carve out a role as spokesman for developing economies went nowhere. "Russia will again be an audience participant rather than a key player," said Chris Weafer, chief strategist with UralSib.

Weafer said the crisis has starkly revealed just how far behind Russia is in terms of importance on global financial markets.

"Russia is the world's biggest energy supplier and a major military power, but that has not yet translated into global financial muscle. We are still very far from that," he said.

Hans-Henning Schroder, an analyst with the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, said Russia was just a middle power economically, politically and militarily.

"Politically, they are on par with, say, Italy, but many in Moscow have problems accepting that," he said by telephone from Berlin.

According to World Bank data, the country's GDP per capita stood at just \$9,620 in 2008, at No. 75, below Mexico and above Chile. In contrast, the United States is in 14th place with \$47,580.

GDP is set to plummet by 8 percent this year, and analysts estimate that the country needs up to \$2 trillion to renovate its dangerously outdated infrastructure.

Schroder said that despite being a nuclear power, Russia lacks the military potential to project power outside its own region. He said Obama had been "very polite" to Medvedev during his visit to Moscow this summer and that, despite denials from the Pentagon, the scrapping of the missile defense plan was a major concession.

"Washington and Europe are now waiting eagerly for Moscow to make a move in their direction," he said.

#8
Yushchenko Unrepentant as Ukraine Sours on Orange Revolution
By James M. Gomez, Daryna Krasnolutska and Halia Pavliva

Bloomberg, September 21, 2009

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko swept into power five years ago at the head of an Orange Revolution that promised national revival. Now he is running fourth in polls as voters blame him for political paralysis and a collapsing economy.

Even as he faces likely defeat in Jan. 17 elections, Yushchenko offers no regrets. He casts his rivals, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and pro-Russian leader Viktor Yanukovich, as "populist" vote-chasers and himself as a champion of unpopular truths about the need for an independent national identity.

"I say words that many don't like, but I won't give up," said Yushchenko, 55, in a Sept. 17 interview in his Kiev office. "If a lot of people don't agree with you, that doesn't mean that you are wrong. Either you aren't popular but deliver a strategic service to the nation, or you dream about elections."

Others say the unrelenting enmity between the president and his adversaries has created a deadlocked government and exacerbated the former Soviet republic's economic troubles.

"This disunity and continual political infighting is setting back the cause of reform and the ability of the country to consolidate its independence and stand comfortably on its own two feet," said John Lough, an associate fellow for Russia and Eurasia at the London-based research group Chatham House.

Parliament has been dissolved on two occasions in the past two years, Russia has twice shut off the country's natural gas supply and the European Union is withholding concrete promises of membership talks.

Economic Woes

The Ukrainian hryvnia has shed 45 percent against the dollar in the past year, the worst-performing of all currencies tracked by Bloomberg. The economy contracted 20.3 percent in the first quarter, the most for all 32 European countries tracked by Bloomberg. Inflation -- 15.3 percent in August -- is the highest of any European country tracked.

Investors have noticed. Elena Suslova, a Moscow-based portfolio adviser with Wermuth Asset Management GmbH, said Ukrainian investments represent only 2 percent of the \$250 million in assets under management that she advises.

After a surge of interest in Ukraine after the 2004 political upheaval that brought Yushchenko to power, Wermuth Asset Management in early 2008 advised its funds to stop all projects in the portfolio for now, Suslova said.

High Risks

Ukrainian voters have also noticed. A poll released Aug. 10 by the Kiev-based Razumkov Center, a research institute, showed Yanukovich, head of the opposition Regions of Ukraine political party, with 21.7 percent, followed by Tymoshenko with 13.2 percent, former parliamentary Speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk with 10.9 percent and Yushchenko with 4.2 percent. The margin of error was 2.3 percentage points.

An unpublished poll by Washington-based PBN Co., an advisory firm for business leaders, investors and governments in eastern Europe, showed a similar result, with Yushchenko in fourth, according to figures provided by Myron Wasylyk, managing director of PBN's Kiev office.

"Five years ago, I believed my country had a chance and was so proud of it and now I am very disappointed," said Lyudmyla Telnyuk, 63, as she waited for her granddaughter at a Kiev music school.

"Yushchenko has been trying really hard to restore Ukrainian culture as well as people's memories of Ukraine's real history, but fights between all these politicians stole away everyone's attention," Telnyuk said.

Ukraine has made some progress, Wasylyk said. It joined the World Trade Organization, the poverty level has dropped to less than 20 percent from 45 percent in 2004 and a free press has emerged, he said.

Falling Jobless Rate

Unemployment fell to 6.9 percent in 2008 from 9.2 percent in 2004, using International Labor Organization standards, Ukrainian state data shows. The International Monetary Fund projects a 2.7 percent growth rate for 2010.

Yushchenko took credit for the progress, saying in the interview: "Today, Ukraine is another country, a country used to the freedom of speech and freedom of choice. That is due to my policies."

Yushchenko spoke about his battles with his adversaries in his high-ceilinged office in the center of Kiev, adorned with a large portrait of Ukrainian writer and painter Taras Shevchenko. He and Timoshenko, 48, have clashed over her push to raise social spending and his demands for budget cuts. Next year's budget deficit, Yushchenko said, may reach 12 percent of gross domestic product.

The prime minister has already started her presidential campaign, with billboards around Kiev that say, "They are blocking, she works."

'Won't Give Up'

"I don't think about elections, I think about my kids -- what country I am going to leave them?" the president said. "I say words that many don't like, but I won't give up."

Yushchenko spoke about the tensions during his tenure between Ukraine and Russia, which opposes Ukraine's stalled bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev last month said he hoped to rebuild ties under "Ukraine's new political leadership" after the elections. Yanukovich blamed Yushchenko for "poor relations" with Russia in a Sept. 19 campaign speech posted on his Web site. He said he shared Medvedev's view that under the current "authorities it is impossible to improve ties."

Yushchenko said that Russia "will have less influence on the January presidential elections. But it is not because they are now less interested and their desire is less. It is only because my nation became more independent."

His face still bears some of the scars from an illness during the 2004 presidential campaign that he said was caused by poisoning from dioxin produced by Russia, a charge Russia denies.

Though Yushchenko didn't mention Yanukovich, 59, by name, he made clear he knows he is far behind him in the polls.

"High ratings are easy to get," Yushchenko said. "You just play populism games and it's there. That is not my way."

#9

Rare glimpse inside hidden Turkmenistan

BBC News, September 17, 2009

Turkmenistan has remained largely closed to the world since its independence from Soviet rule in 1991. The BBC's Rayhan Demytrie took advantage of a Silk Road car rally to see the country.

Welcome to Turkmenistan: "Passports, please. Put your bags on the scales," said a bossy customs officer at Ashgabad's airport.

This was our fourth passport check since arriving at what is officially called Saparmurat Turkmenbashi International airport.

But his expression soon changed.

"Oh... journalists, here for the rally? Welcome to Turkmenistan!" he said with a broad smile.

Turkmenistan is Central Asia's most isolated country. But it has been hosting an event the government wanted to publicise.

The Silk Way Rally was a week-long car race of professionals and amateurs beginning in Kazan in Russia, winding its way through the Kazakh steppe and into the deserts of Turkmenistan.

It was an opportunity for natural gas-rich Turkmenistan to show how well it is doing - and for journalists it was a rare chance to visit a state that has been largely closed to the outside world.

White City

Every morning an army of street cleaners sweeps, scrapes and washes the central squares and avenues of Ashgabad, Turkmenistan's capital.

The city looks spotless. Smoking is banned outdoors and the penalty if you're caught is a steep \$50 (?30).

There are enough policemen in the streets to ensure citizens obey the rules.

" Turkmenistan is a great country - look at our capital "

Tursun, Ashgabad street cleaner

In fact, there is one policeman every 100m, even in the quietest of places.

"I am kind of used to it, and I think it is not that bad," said one resident who did not want to be named. "At least we always feel safe."

Ashgabad has been under redevelopment for years. The building was begun under its former leader, the authoritarian Saparmurat Niyazov.

Nothing has stood in the way of Turkmenistan's construction boom.

Dubbed the White City, Ashgabad is full of high buildings with white marble facades.

All major public buildings, including government ministries, palaces, museums and schools, have been given the marble treatment.

Many residents are proud of their new city.

Gas pride

"Turkmenistan is a great country - look at our capital," says a street cleaner named Tursun.

"If you work hard, you earn money and live well. I work six days a week, clean the tiles of these fountains and trim rose bushes. I get paid about \$100 a month. We are happy, thank you to our president, he says."

The country's leadership claims the country has not been affected by the global financial crisis.

There is some truth to this, as Turkmenistan has had little contact with international markets.

An independent audit carried out in 2008 claimed the country has the fifth-largest proven gas reserves in the world.

Unsurprisingly, the international community has been courting the country, hoping for a stake in Turkmenistan's hydrocarbon wealth.

Only recently President Kurbanguly Berdymukhamedov announced his intention to join the Nabucco pipeline, the EU-backed project that would deliver Caspian gas to Europe, bypassing Russia.

Wind of change?

But rights groups have long warned that, seduced by gas, the international community has not put enough pressure on the country regarding political and social freedoms.

"It is much better now, we can travel from one region to another without special permission," says a woman in Turkmenistan's largest market, Tolkuchka, in the outskirts of Ashgabad.

Many here inevitably compare the recent past under Mr Niyazov - who pursued a cult of personality - to his successor, President Berdymukhamedov.

He has made a number of reforms, adopting a new constitution, restoring the country's parliament and reintroducing traditional names for days of the week and months.

He even restored the opera and circus - both pronounced alien to Turkmen culture under Mr Niyazov.

Today Mr Niyazov's pervasive legacy is fading away. The statues to him remain, but the golden paint is slowly peeling.

Repeating history

But three years into President Berdymukhamedov's rule, his portraits are increasingly replacing Mr Niyazov's.

In March a new mosque named after the president opened. A new modern school has taken his grandfather's name.

At the expense of foreign reading material, bookstores are full of the president's own works.

These include a colour compendium on the Turkmen national horse and a book about herbal medicine.

There is no independent media in Turkmenistan. State television channels and newspapers praise the government.

People prefer not to discuss politics. Any question which deviates from the positive makes them feel uncomfortable.

There have been worrying new developments, including restrictions on the right of Turkmen students to travel abroad.

Over the summer many were taken off planes as they were leaving to pursue studies at foreign universities.

At the departure lounge in Ashgabad international airport the majority of outbound passengers are students. They clutch papers that are being checked by state security officers.

Some are turned away.

Turkmenistan wants to show that it is slowly opening up to the outside world. But for many of its own citizens the country's borders remain closed.

#10

Ukraine plans hotel on site of Babi Yar massacre by Nazis

By Uzi Dann

Haaretz, September 23, 2009

The opening line from Yevgeny Yevtushenko's most famous poem, "Babi Yar" - "No monument stands over Babi Yar" - may once again be an accurate reflection of reality if Kiev's municipality carries out its plan to build a hotel on the memorial site of one of the most notorious massacres of Jews during the Holocaust.

On September 29 and 30, 1941, German SS troops, supported by other German units and local collaborators, gathered 33,771 Jewish civilians at the ravine outside Kiev and murdered them with machine guns.

Attempts to commemorate the massacre after the war were thwarted by the Soviet Union.

Yevtushenko, a Russian poet, novelist, essayist, dramatist and film director born July 18, 1933, was politically active during the Khrushchev Thaw. He wrote what would become perhaps his most famous poem, "Babi Yar," in 1961.

Noting the absence of a memorial in Babi Yar, the poem denounces the Soviet distortion of history concerning the Nazi massacre of Kiev's Jews as well as anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union.

Soccer tourism

After the Soviet Union's collapse, Ukraine set up a monument on the site.

Last week, however, the Kiev municipality approved a plan to build 28 hotels to accommodate the tens of thousands of visitors expected for soccer's 2012 European Championships. One of these hotels is planned to be set up on the Babi Yar site, now in a residential area of Kiev.

Kiev Mayor Leonid Chernovetskyi has reportedly been interested in turning his city's remaining green space into real estate and is taking advantage of Euro 2012 to implement his plan, city sources said.

City councilman Sergei Melnik, one of the many who oppose the plan, on Tuesday leaked the details to the media.

#11

**Kiev plans hotel at Babi Yar site
JTA, September 23, 2009**

KIEV, Ukraine -- The Kiev municipality's decision to build a hotel on the site of the Babi Yar massacre memorial has alarmed Ukraine's Jewish community.

Kiev officials approved a plan Sept. 17 to build 28 hotels to accommodate the tens of thousands of visitors expected for soccer's 2012 European Championship, including one at the Babi Yar site, the UNIAN news agency reported Tuesday.

More than 33,700 Jews were gathered and killed by the Nazis along the Babi Yar ravine's edge on Sept. 29 and 30, 1941.

The Babi Yar memorial is located in a residential area of the Ukraine capital.

Kiev City Councilman Sergey Melnik, who opposes the plan, told JTA that 67 Kiev capital deputies voted for the hotel plan without knowing essential details of the construction. Kiev Mayor Leonid Chernovetsky reportedly has shown interest in building on Kiev's green spaces, Melnik said.

According to Kiev municipality officials, there are 125 hotels in Kiev -- far fewer than in European capitals.

#12

**Ukraine: hotel plan for Nazi killing field opposed
By Maria Danilova
AP, September 24, 2009**

KIEV, Ukraine — Jewish groups condemned Thursday a plan by authorities in the Ukrainian capital to build a hotel on what a leading scholar said was a killing field in the Babi Yar massacre, a horrific chapter of the Holocaust.

The controversy erupted days before the 68th anniversary of the killing of more than 30,000 Jews in late September 1941 at Babi Yar, a ravine that became choked with the bodies of victims shot at its edges.

Legislators loyal to Kiev mayor Leonid Chernovetsky approved a plan last week to build dozens of hotels in the city over the next decade, including one across the street from a monument commemorating the victims.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel decried the plan, saying it disrespected the dead and demonstrated Ukrainian authorities' reluctance to investigate wartime collaboration with the Nazis.

"The plan to build a hotel on the site of the one of the worst Holocaust massacres is an example of utter insensitivity to the terrible crimes committed by the Nazis and their Ukrainian collaborators during World War II," the Center said in a statement. "We urge the Ukrainian authorities to take all necessary measures to prevent the building of such an obviously inappropriate edifice at Babi Yar."

More than 33,700 Jews were rounded up and shot at Babi Yar over 48 hours beginning on Sept. 29, 1941. In the ensuing months, the ravine was filled with an estimated 100,000 bodies, among them those of non-Jewish Kiev residents and Red Army prisoners of the Nazis.

The hotel would be built in the middle of the main killing site, according to Vitaliy Nakhmanovich, a leading Ukrainian Babi Yar scholar.

"You wouldn't build a hotel in Babi Yar because you would be afraid that nobody would go there," Nakhmanovich said. "But they build for people like themselves."

Oleksandr Bryhynets, who heads the Kiev city council's culture and tourism commission, said the planned three-star, 700-room hotel would be named Babi Yar. He called the plan immoral and said he would fight it.

"Such sacred places, which have already become the face of the city ... are no place for hotels," said Bryhynets, a member of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's faction in the city council. "The authorities have no morals."

Lawmaker Viktor Hrinuk, from Chernovetsky's faction, said the hotel would not disturb any remains. He also said the plan was not final and subject to change.

"We need to start somewhere," Hrinuk said, according to his party's press service. "When the land is distributed, then we can start discussions."

Jewish leaders have expressed concern over what they say are persistent instances of disrespect for Jewish heritage and of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, which lost 1.4 million of its 2.4 million Jews during the Holocaust.

The mayor of the western city of Uzhhorod is under investigation for making what was widely seen as an anti-Semitic remark referring to a leading politician and presidential hopeful.

Ukraine is also torn by controversy over the extent of wartime collaboration with the Nazis.

Jewish leaders also condemned Tuesday's decision by lawmakers in the western city of Lviv to call on President Viktor Yushchenko to secure the release of a Ukrainian-born man accused by German authorities of involvement in the murder of 27,900 people at a Nazi death camp. The legislators say they believe 89-year-old John Demjanjuk, who lived for decades in the United States following the war, is innocent and that materials incriminating him were fabricated by Soviet authorities.

#13

Babi Yar hotel decision condemned BBC News, September 24, 2009

Jewish groups have condemned a decision by the city of Kiev to allow a hotel to be built at the site of a Nazi massacre during World War Two, reports say.

Local authorities have approved plans to build dozens of hotels for the 2012 European Football Championship.

One will be near a monument to victims of the Babi Yar massacre, where the Nazi killed 34,000 Jews in 1941.

The Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Israel says the plan showed "utter insensitivity" to their memory.

The hotel is set to be built in the middle of the main site of the killings, according to Vitaliy Nakhmanovich, a leading Ukrainian Babi Yar scholar, reports say.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center said in a statement: "The plan to build a hotel on the site of the one of the worst Holocaust massacres is an example of utter insensitivity to the terrible crimes committed by the Nazis and their Ukrainian collaborators during World War II.

"We urge the Ukrainian authorities to take all necessary measures to prevent the building of such an obviously inappropriate edifice at Babi Yar," the statement added.

A senior lawmaker in Kiev, Viktor Hrinuk, who is close to the city mayor, said the hotel would not disturb any remains and that plans were not final and are subject to change.

In the past, Jewish leaders have expressed concerns over what they say are cases of persistent disrespect for Jewish heritage and of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, reports say.

Around 33,700 Jews were rounded up and shot at Babi Yar over two days, beginning on 29 Sept 1941.

Over the following months, the Nazis filled the Babi Yar ravine with an estimated 100,000 bodies, including the bodies of non-Jewish residents of Kiev and Soviet army prisoners.

#14

Putin v Medvedev Financial Times, September 23, 2009

The political shadow-boxing between Russian president Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin, the prime minister, complicates life for those doing business with Moscow.

Each man has recently dropped intriguing hints about running for the presidency in 2012 when Mr Medvedev's term ends. Since it will be some time before their plans become clear, there is a risk Russian policy-making may suffer from the confusion generated by the presidential race.

Indeed, this already seems to have happened with Russia's bid to join the World Trade Organisation. Much to everybody's surprise, Mr Putin in June abandoned Russia's sole bid for a joint approach with Kazakhstan and Belarus. No warning was given, of a move widely seen in Moscow as a shot across the president's bows.

At one level, none of this matters. Mr Putin remains Russia's most powerful man. He and his top officials plan to retain power – and control over Russia's profitable extractive industries – for a long time. While there are tensions in this elite, the forces compelling its members to pull together are huge.

So, Mr Putin will almost certainly decide the 2012 question – and take his followers with him.

But uncertainties lie in how he does this. Russia is no simple autocracy in which the boss just barks out orders. Competing lobbies, including the powerful security services, must be managed. So must the way decisions are presented to the public – and the rest of the world.

Appearance matters as much as reality. Even if Mr Putin and Mr Medvedev are merely pretending to compete – perhaps to create an illusion of political pluralism – others may still see the competition as real, and respond accordingly.

Moscow risks generating misunderstandings, just when key questions are on the international agenda, including Iran, the Middle East and nuclear arms. Similarly, Russian and foreign companies wanting to talk business with state-run agencies and enterprises may have to pay even more attention than before to the political atmosphere. It will be harder – and perhaps more important – to judge which officials are in, which are out and which are in between.

Of course, all states have their complexities. But succession questions matter more in Moscow than elsewhere. After all, last year's handover of the presidency from Mr Putin to Mr Medvedev was the first time in Russian/Soviet history that a healthy incumbent voluntarily gave up the keys to the Kremlin, or even pretended to do so.

#15

Human rights monitoring reveals wide-spread violations across Russia Interfax, September 22, 2009

Human rights monitoring in constituent parts of the Russian Federation has revealed an unfavourable human rights situation in Russia.

"The information which was provided by human rights organizations shows that last year the situation regarding the observance of human rights in Russia was unfavourable to a considerable degree," Aleksandr Brod, a human rights champion and member of the Public Chamber, today told the workshop conference, "Human rights monitoring of the observance of human rights in constituent parts of the Russian Federation".

Between April and July members of the Public Chamber Aleksandr Brod and Vladislav Grib carried out human rights monitoring in constituent parts of the Russian Federation.

They visited 15 cities, including Moscow, St Petersburg, Kursk, Yaroslavl, Tolyatti, Novosibirsk, Perm, Ufa, Krasnodar, Chelyabinsk and others.

According to Brod, monitoring showed that civil and political rights of citizens were considerably violated and that noncommercial human rights organizations (NGOs) "are subjected to pressure on the part of officials and the media".

"In the conditions of crisis many enterprises did not pay salaries and forced employees to leave without severance pay.

And under the new Labour Code there are practically no provisions allowing strikes and protests to be held legally," Brod said.

Also, according to him, monitoring revealed unlawfulness on the part of law-enforcement agencies that apply torture and beatings of detainees. "

There is a very tense situation in the North Caucasus where terrorist suspects are kidnapped, then subjected to torture and forced to make confessions," Brod said.

Among other violations, he mentioned attacks on ethnic grounds, violence in the army, attacks on the clergy, the unjustifiably restricted role of the jury and the shortcomings of the judicial system.

For his part, Grib said that during their monitoring they had come across a lack of understanding on the part of regional authorities.

"In Rostov we felt like protagonists of a detective novel: we were followed and halls where we were to meet citizens were closed," Grib said.

On the other hand, he said, in some cities - for instance Kursk - the authorities showed understanding and interest towards the rights campaigners.

#16

Medvedev Asks Nuclear Nations to Join Russia, U.S. in Arms Cuts

By Peter S. Green and Lyubov Pronina

Bloomberg, September 23, 2009

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev called on countries with declared and undeclared stocks of nuclear weapons to join Russia and the U.S. to reduce their atomic arsenals.

"Other nuclear states should join the disarmament efforts of Russia and the United States," without waiting for the two superpowers to make their own cuts, Medvedev said in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly.

Medvedev cited the 1921-22 Washington Conference that reduced the size of the world's navies, the weapons of mass destruction of their day, as a way of cutting nuclear arms without requiring all countries' arsenals be the same size.

Such an arrangement would give "a necessary signal of certainty" that the "unaccounted numbers" of weapons belonging to the world's undeclared nuclear powers would be "added to the equation of strategic stability."

A new Russian-U.S. nuclear arms reduction treaty that Russia and the U.S. agreed in July to negotiate will signal to the rest of the world that nonproliferation and strategic stability are compatible, he said.

He said the U.S. decision to drop a missile-defense proposal in Poland and the Czech Republic was a "constructive" step and said Russia is ready to hold a "thorough" discussion of the U.S. and Russian proposals on missile defense.

"We must engage all nations and international organizations in these negotiations," Medvedev said.

Reducing Stockpiles

President Barack Obama and Medvedev met in July in Moscow and called for a reduction of nuclear arsenals to between 1,500 and 1,675 warheads and between 500 and 1,100 delivery systems.

Under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which expires in December, and a 2002 agreement, the maximum allowable number of warheads is 2,200 and the maximum number of launch vehicles is 1,600, according to the document.

Medvedev called for establishing a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

He said the brief conflict between Russia and Georgia over the disputed region of South Ossetia in August last year had the potential to become a "full-scale war" and Medvedev called for "mechanisms to implement the principle of indivisibility of security."

He said Russia wants a new Euro-Atlantic treaty that would enshrine the principle "not to ensure one's own security at the expense of others."

Departing from his prepared text, Medvedev said he endorsed a comment made by Obama in his speech to the Assembly today.

Security Principles

"He stated that no single country can or should attempt to dominate another," Medvedev said. "This is absolutely right. However, these agreed approaches need to be implemented in some way" including through UN bodies.

"Irresponsible regimes should not have any opportunity whatsoever to cause disputes between other countries," he said. Medvedev has referred this way in the past to the government of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Russia later recognized South Ossetia and a second region, Abkhazia, as sovereign countries. The move was condemned by Western nations, including the U.S.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Sept. 21 that Russia should abide by last year's cease-fire agreement with Georgia and told Saakashvili in New York the U.S. supports his country's "territorial integrity."

Clinton pledged "strong support for Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity," Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Phil Gordon said after the discussions.

#17

US-Russian sanctions would put pressure on Iran

By Robert Burns

AP, September 24, 2009

A unified U.S.-Russian stance on sanctions against Iran would put added pressure on Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to yield some ground on his nation's nuclear program.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev opened the door Wednesday to backing potential sanctions as a reward for President Barack Obama's decision to scale back a U.S. missile shield in Eastern Europe.

While U.S. and Russian officials denied a flat-out quid pro quo, Medvedev told the U.N. General Assembly that Obama's pivot on a missile defense plan long loathed by Moscow "deserves a positive response." Obama himself has said his missile decision may have spurred Russian good will as a "bonus."

"We believe we need to help Iran to take a right decision," Medvedev said after the two leaders met on the sidelines of the U.N. assembly.

Ahmadinejad has taken a softer tone on many matters since arriving in New York for the U.N. meetings, emphasizing his interest in improving relations with the United States and expressing an openness to include nuclear matters on the negotiations agenda.

He has given no sign, however, that his country is willing to bargain away its nuclear program, which he insists is for peaceful purposes only. In an interview Wednesday with The Washington Post and Newsweek, he said he would be willing to have Iranian nuclear scientists meet with experts from the U.S. and other countries.

In his speech to the General Assembly on Wednesday night, Ahmadinejad made no explicit reference to nuclear matters or prospective sanctions.

Obama's chief Russia adviser, Mike McFaul, told reporters after the meeting with Medvedev that there was no deal with Moscow on missile defense and Iran. Pressed further, he said: "Is it the case that it changes the climate? That's true, of course. But it's not cause-and-effect."

A member of the Russian delegation, speaking on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the Russians, said Moscow's final position on the question of imposing further sanctions would be determined, to a large extent, by Medvedev's consultations here.

The U.S. and Russia are among six countries that will hold talks in Europe next week with Iran over its nuclear ambitions. Obama wants to reserve the possibility of pursuing tougher sanctions if those meetings lead to no restraint by Iran in the weeks ahead. Russia, which has strong economic ties with Tehran, has stood in the way of stronger action against Iran in the past.

In remarks to reporters with Medvedev at his side, Obama said both agree that negotiations with Iran are still the best approach.

"We also both agree that if Iran does not respond to serious negotiations and resolve this issue in a way that assures the international community that it's meeting its commitments, and is not developing nuclear weapons, then we will have to take additional actions and that sanctions, serious additional sanctions, remain a possibility," Obama said.

Medvedev told reporters that the intent is to move Iran in the right direction and to ensure that it does not obtain nuclear weapons.

"Sanctions rarely lead to productive results but in some cases are inevitable," he said through an interpreter.

Medvedev also mentioned that his government welcomed Obama's decision last week to scrap a Bush administration plan for a missile defense system to be based in Poland and the Czech Republic. He gave no indication that his remark about the sanctions on Iran was a diplomatic payoff for Obama's missile defense move.

In his address to the U.N. General Assembly earlier Wednesday, Obama stuck to his two-pronged approach to Iran - acknowledging its right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy while warning of unspecified penalties if it veers onto the weapons path.

"We must insist that the future not belong to fear," he said.

Yushchenko recalled that Ukraine and Russia signed an agreement providing for the withdrawal of the fleet and that under the Ukrainian constitution, no foreign troops can be stationed on Ukrainian territory. He added that agreements were signed to be fulfilled, and complained that the presence of the fleet in Sevastopol caused quite a few problems, including relating to property, land, radio frequencies and coastal navigation.

He described as "illegal" statements that Sevastopol is a Russian city. "These are things that humiliate someone's independence and territorial integrity," he said.

Yushchenko added that he had asked the Prosecutor-General's Office to find out whether Russia was granting citizenship to Sevastopol residents. He recalled that dual citizenship is prohibited in Ukraine.

He said Russia was to blame for the failure to demarcate the border with Ukraine. "We believe that both countries have been technically ready for a long time to sign this agreement and carry out demarcation," he said. "Unfortunately, this job is not being done not through our fault."

Commenting on Ukraine's presidential race, due to start officially in October, Yushchenko said he would tolerate no outside pressure on the electoral process, including by Russia.

"The election of a president in Ukraine is the sovereign right of the Ukrainian people, and we want neither media, nor political, nor diplomatic pressure from anybody, including Russia."

He added that there were politicians in Ukraine relying on Russian support. "I do not accept it either as a citizen or as president," he said. "It will not be decided outside Ukraine in January 2010 who will be Ukraine's president."

Referring to Russia's concerns about Ukraine's bid to join NATO, Yushchenko said that it posed no threat to any state.

"NATO membership and Ukrainian independence are almost synonyms," he said, adding that Ukraine's entry into NATO "will not be used to threaten third countries".

#18
Foreign Firms Invited to Russian Gas Fields
By Andrew E. Kramer
New York Times, September 25, 2009

MOSCOW — Just a few years after compelling foreign oil companies to renegotiate their contracts in Russia, Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin has invited executives from some of the largest such companies to discuss new work on Siberian natural gas fields.

Executives from Shell, Exxon Mobil, Total and other companies met with Mr. Putin in Salekhard, a city in the Yamal-Nenets district that is rich in large deposits of untapped natural gas.

Mr. Putin said he called the meeting to discuss strategies to develop the Yamal Peninsula, a treeless realm jutting into the Arctic Ocean that is so dense in gas fields it is sometimes called the Saudi Arabia of gas.

Mr. Putin did not make any specific offers to the gathered energy executives but said instead that he wanted to open a dialogue about the region's future.

"We are ready for broad partnership and that is why we invited you here," Mr. Putin said, according to a transcript posted on the government Web site. "We want you to feel like members of our team, participants in this process."

Mr. Putin's softening tone on energy deals with Western oil companies inside Russia mirrors a long-term trend in the petroleum business. Oil-rich countries often seek to renegotiate when prices rise and become more conciliatory as they fall and industries need capital and expertise to maintain output.

Oil prices are now about the same level they were in 2006 and 2007 when the Russian government compelled renegotiations. However, the steep — if brief — drop to below \$40 a barrel, close to the break-even production costs of some fields in Russia, dispelled the belief that oil prices, which have rebounded to the \$70 range, might remain elevated indefinitely. Mr. Putin said "transparency" and "stability" would be the principles of new contracts.

Three years ago, while the renegotiations were under way, Russian officials had suggested that national companies would develop most onshore fields from then on.

Gazprom, the natural gas monopoly, had announced an ambitious plan to develop the Yamal Peninsula, only to scale it back during the global recession as financing dried up and gas demand slumped.

Alex Fak, an oil and gas analyst at Troika Dialog in Moscow, said the meeting was expected as Russian state oil and gas companies had been indicating for months that they would seek to work with foreign partners to develop the fields on Yamal Peninsula. "The upstream development could go much more smoothly with foreign participation," he said.

Energy executives were cautiously optimistic. Neil Duffin, the president of development at Exxon Mobil, said the company wanted to work on Yamal. "This is our hope," he was quoted as saying in news reports from Salekhard confirmed by Exxon.

Still, the Russian ministers of economy and natural resources suggested at the meeting that they would strike a hard bargain. They said deals would be structured so that the foreign firms that received access to the reserves would transfer technology to Russia's oil industry by placing orders with Russian factories, localizing production and hiring Russian engineers to work on the development.

#19

At UN, few signs of Russia warming to Obama, but nuclear cooperation may improve

Russian President Medvedev made few new concessions in response to the canceling of Russia's Eastern European missile-shield plan. But new ways to cooperate on threats like Iran's nuclear program and instability in Afghanistan are emerging.

By Fred Weir

Christian Science Monitor, September 24, 2009

Moscow - Russian President Dmitry Medvedev may have just been handed major US concessions on top of international priorities, but there were few signs of reciprocity in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly or in his brief tête-à-tête with Barack Obama on Wednesday.

In fact, it's hard to see how Mr. Medvedev's words and actions in New York yesterday would have been much different if the US had stuck to its plan to install antimissile defenses in Eastern Europe last week, or if NATO expansion into the former Soviet Union were still on the table. Both the missile defense system and NATO plans (apparently) were shelved. Last week, NATO's new Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen called instead for a new era of cooperation between the Western military alliance and Russia, which ought to have been music to Moscow's ears.

But while Medvedev provided little in the way of new concessions in return for these diplomatic gains, analysts say the groundwork has in fact been laid for closer cooperation between Russia and the US. Medvedev welcomed the missile defense change as a "constructive step in the right direction" and suggested that Russia might be amenable to supporting tough sanctions against Iran.

To be sure, Russian officials struck some sour notes this week, with one of their diplomats suggesting that Washington's cancellation of the planned antimissile deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic was not a genuine concession to Moscow, but instead more evidence that the US does not understand Russia.

"It shows to us that the US continues to be a rather difficult negotiating partner, a partner who is loaded in many ways by a cold-war mentality," Russian UN ambassador Vitaly Churkin told journalists this week. "By doing that they are undermining the value of the decision in our eyes."

Russian game changers

However, some Russian experts say that while there's been no dramatic change in US-Russian relations, the ground is slowly shifting. They argue that practical opportunities are now opening up that could be game changers.

"You need to look at the long term, and not be obsessed with the minor day-to-day quarrels that go on," says Viktor Kremeniuk, deputy director of the official Institute of USA-Canada Studies in Moscow, who has been a regular participant in a group of experts (headed by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and ex-Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov) that's been quietly trying to map out a route to a strategic partnership for the past two years.

"We see a big and dangerous gap between the potential for cooperation between Moscow and Washington, and the reality," he says. "The problem is to bridge that gap, by doing things jointly, in ways that increase mutual confidence and improve the atmosphere."

For instance, Russia and the US disagree about the threat that Iran's nuclear project poses to the world, but they also agree on the need to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime to enable countries to gain access to civilian atomic technology while blocking attempts at weaponization.

Russian experts say Medvedev and Mr. Obama are closer than ever to finding a joint approach and that Russia may now for the first time be prepared to back a tough program of sanctions against Iran if it refuses to go along.

"Now we may be able to find a compromise," says Andrei Klimov, deputy chair of the Russian State Duma's foreign affairs committee. "After all, Russia doesn't want to see more countries with nuclear weapons and ballistic-missile capabilities near our borders. But we need to protect our national interests, too; we're not just going to become pawns in someone else's agenda."

On missile defense the Kremlin argued long and hard against the Bush-era plan, largely on the grounds that it might one day threaten Russia's aging strategic deterrent. But now that Obama has shifted the emphasis to tactical defenses, which would focus on specific danger points such as Iran and North Korea, the basic picture is different.

Joint threats

"Now we can have a joint threat assessment and pool our resources to counter those potential threats," says Dmitri Suslov, an expert with the Council on Foreign and Defense Policies, a Moscow think tank. "If we don't see a strategic challenge in it, that makes a lot of difference. Russia could contribute a lot to a common defense against rogue launches: we have technology, territorial expanse, and other resources to offer."

On Afghanistan, Russia has already dropped its objections to a US air base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan and is enabling a transport corridor through former Soviet territory to resupply the NATO mission. But Moscow has also been eyeing greater involvement in the turbulent central Asian country, which it occupied unsuccessfully in the 1980s, for some time.

"There's a good deal more that Russia and its local allies can do to help the NATO operation in Afghanistan, short of sending in troops, and that seems much more likely now," says Mr. Suslov. "This sort of cooperation is also a major confidence-booster."

With strategic missile defense off the table for the time being it also seems likely that the US and Russia may finalize a replacement for the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty before it expires in December.

"The work is under way," Medvedev told journalists Wednesday. "A good start allowed us to hope that our teams will cope and in due time we will have a document."

If real cooperation can take off in just a few practical areas, the entire forecast on US-Russian relations could change from cloudy to sunshine, says Mr. Kremeniuk.

"There is a real chance to change the paradigm, but it needs to be done by looking beyond the short-term quarrels and building on points of agreement," he says. "There are enduring differences, to be sure, but there's no shortage of opportunities for cooperation."

#20

Two First Steps on Nuclear Weapons

By Mikhail Gorbachev

New York Times, September 25, 2009

YESTERDAY, President Obama presided over the United Nations Security Council meeting that passed a resolution seeking to strengthen the international commitment to limiting the spread of nuclear weapons. A week ago, he announced that the United States will not deploy - at least, not in the foreseeable future - a missile defense site in Central Europe, including powerful radar in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles in Poland.

Is there a link between the two events? I believe there is. Yet initial comments by many political figures and journalists have for the most part ignored this key relationship.

Instead, many are asserting that canceling the Eastern European missile defense was simply a concession to Russia, which must now reciprocate with a concession of its own. But President Dmitri Medvedev of Russia had already said last November that if the United States made changes to its missile defense plans, his nation would refrain from countermeasures like deploying its own missiles. Soon after President Obama's decision was announced, this position was reaffirmed.

Many of President Obama's critics in the United States insist that he "caved in" to Russian pressure, virtually leaving America's NATO allies to fend for themselves. There is nothing behind this argument other than the old stereotype of "bad Russia," a Russia that is always wrong.

Consider the merits of the case. Russia's leaders have been saying for some time that the fear of Iran developing effective long-range missiles in the near future was not grounded in fact. Now, after a thorough review by intelligence and defense officials, the United States government has come to the same conclusion, holding that Tehran is perhaps at least five years or even a decade away from such capacity.

The initial reaction by some politicians and commentators in Poland and the Czech Republic is no less odd. They seem to enjoy the role of a spoiler in relations between other countries and Russia. Voices of realism and caution are routinely rejected, and the opinion of their own citizens, who by and large have no use for radars and missiles, is brushed aside.

In Russia, President Obama's decision has been well received. It also met with support in Europe, with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy of France lauding it. The Polish prime minister, Donald Tusk, called it "a chance to strengthen European security." Indeed, if the president's decision is followed by further serious steps, it will provide an opportunity for us to strengthen global security as well as reach a new level of cooperation in ridding the world of nuclear danger.

At their meeting in Moscow in early July, Presidents Obama and Medvedev reaffirmed the relationship between strategic offensive weapons and missile defense. The two nations continue arms reduction talks and, judging by cautious diplomatic statements, they seem to be on course to complete them by Dec. 5, when the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty - which I signed with President George H. W. Bush in 1991 - is due to expire.

This week's United Nations meeting marks the next stage of progress. It is vital that other nations come away from the meeting believing that America and Russia are moving toward verifiable nuclear arms reductions, and that by the time the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty review conference is held at the United Nations next May, they will have made progress toward the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

Unless they show the world they are serious, the two major nuclear powers will be accused, again and again, of not keeping their word and told that if it is acceptable for 5 or 10 countries to have nuclear weapons as their "ultimate security guarantee," why should it not be the case for 20 or 30 others?

It is vital that the two presidents themselves monitor the negotiations closely, sometimes plunging into minute details. I know from experience how difficult it is to deal with such technical details on top of constant political pressures, but it is necessary to avoid misunderstandings that could undermine trust.

Some questions that will need to be clarified are evident now. The American secretary of defense, Robert Gates, has said that the SM-3 missiles that are to be used under the new missile-defense plan could later be perfected to intercept long-range intercontinental missiles. Yet he has also raised the possibility of cooperating with Russia on missile defense. To me, these two ideas seem incompatible. The sooner such issues are cleared up the better.

As I see it, there is only one way to move forward: Washington should agree to the Russian proposal for a joint assessment of missile threats. Let the experts from both countries have a frank discussion that would reveal which threats are real and must be dealt with, and which are imaginary. This would help to avoid misguided projects like the Polish-Czech missile shield, and could help move us from a state of mutual deterrence to a goal of minimum nuclear sufficiency for self-defense.

This is a big agenda. Realistically, it would take two or three years of intense negotiation. But Russia and the United States must set big tasks for themselves. What is needed is nothing less than a change in the strategic relationship between the two major nuclear powers - in their own interests and in the cause of world peace.

#21

Russia Will Not Stop Supplying Defensive Systems to Iran – Experts Interfax, September 24, 2009

Russian political scientists believe the intensification of the Russian-U.S. talks on Iran does not call into question Russian-Iranian military-technical cooperation, including the supply of S-300 systems.

"The issue of imposing sanctions on Iran raised in the negotiations between Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama calls for absolutely clear legal substantiation. The IAEA has not made any claims against Iran, and the information based on manipulation by the Western intelligence services cannot be used as grounds," Gleb Pavlovsky, president of the Effective Policy Foundation, told Interfax on Thursday.

Pavlovsky believes Russia has no reason to dramatically change its position on Iran. "IAEA claims against Tehran could be grounds. Even if such claims are brought, the most that can be expected of Russia is its consent to take part in the discussion of the sanctions," Pavlovsky said.

Pavlovsky believes Russia should not be expected to stop supplying S-300 systems to Iran. "S-300 is a defensive weapon and its supplies will in no way affect the evaluation of the observance of Iran's nuclear non-proliferation obligations," he said.

Some countries' hopes for Russia's consent to sanctions and halt of S-300 supplies to Iran are ungrounded, Rajab Safarov, general director of the center for Modern Iran Studies, said.

"President Medvedev clearly said the use of sanctions is ineffective. Clearly, Russia will not agree to sanctions in response to the cancellation of the (U.S. plans to deploy) missile defense systems (in Europe). It's not a deal," Safarov told Interfax.

The expert believes Russia has several reasons not to join the sanctions regime, including the fact that "the U.S. has indirectly confirmed that Iran is not conducting any development work violating its international obligations."

As for the supply of S-300 systems to Iran, it is solely an issue between Russia and Iran, Safarov said. "There is a treaty on the supply of defensive systems. Russia has no reason to refuse," the expert said.

At the same time, the expert admitted that the absence in the treaty of a provision dealing with dates of supply gives the opponents an opportunity to build versions that Russia may be playing a diplomatic game, in which amendments can be made depending on the situation.

"In reality, when it comes to diplomacy, Russia presently has the most influence of reducing tensions in the region," Safarov said.